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Desiring Queer, Negotiating Normal: Denise Ho (HOCC) Fandom before and after the Coming-Out

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Abstract

This chapter explores the entanglement between the desire of queer and struggle with normativities in fandom through the case study of the fandom of Denise Ho (a.k.a. HOCC) in Hong Kong. HOCC is one of the few celebrities in the Chinese-language entertainment industry to have come out as a lesbian. Data are drawn from participant observation and semi-structured interviews with 29 fans between 2009 and 2014. By discerning of the interplay between Hong Kong sexual cultures, fans' everyday life, and fans' interaction with global media, it is found that fans struggled with negotiating HOCC's gender and sexuality and their own before HOCC's coming-out, leading to the paradoxical celebration and self-policing of queer reading at the same time. HOCC's coming out in 2012 has significantly reshaped her queer fandom. It is observed that fans have turned their attention to the negotiation of HOCC's "proper" lesbian embodiment as the "correct" representation of the LGBT/*tongzhi* movement. By revealing the complex relations between heteronormativity and homonormativity, this chapter concludes that HOCC fans in Hong Kong, who are situated within macrostructural and micropolitical forces, desire to be queer by transgressing normal and paradoxically desire to be normal by tactically negotiating the limits of queer.

Keywords

Cantopop, Hong Kong popular culture, androgyny, *zhongxing*, heteronormativity, homonormativity, *tongzhi*, queer politics, celebrity activism

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Introduction

Denise Wan-See Ho (a.k.a. HOCC) is one of the few celebrities in the East Asian Chinese-language entertainment industry to have come out as a lesbian in public. This chapter explores the entanglement and tension in HOCC fandom in Hong Kong between the desire to be queer and the struggle with normativity before and after her coming-out. By adopting the terms “queer” and “normal” as analytical tools, I contextualize the queer fan culture of HOCC by demonstrating the interplay among fans’ lived experience, sexual cultures in Hong Kong, and global information flows. Queer reading arises when the boundary between queer and normal is contested. It is fans’ frustration with (hetero)normativity that enacts queer fan practices. Nonetheless, living in a heteronormative society also means that fans are constantly seeking or being compelled to normalize and police such practices.

I use “queer” in two ways. The first refers to the process of production of meaning as analogous to a “flexible space for the expression of all aspects of non-, anti-, contra-, and straight cultural production and reception.”¹ It is an attitude that goes beyond binarism in gender (male/female) and in sexuality (heterosexuality/homosexuality).² Therefore, queer positions and queer readings are not marginal to but always parts of the erotic center of culture because queer often operates within the nonqueer and vice versa.³ Second, I use “queer” as the provisional academic shorthand for LGBT identities.⁴ The scholarship in queer Asia studies has suggested that Western post-Stonewall LGBT identities may not be directly applicable to the hybrid formation of nonheterosexual and nonnormative genders and sexualities in Asia.⁵ Instead, these genders and sexualities are the results of the complex interplay between historical trajectories and global forces. In Hong Kong, both the English term “queer” and its Chinese translation *ku'er* (Hanyu pinyin) / *hukji* (Cantonese

¹ Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

² Ibid., 3–4.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ara Wilson, “Queering Asia,” *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context* 14 (2006), accessed September 20, 2013, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue14/wilson.html>.

⁵ For example, Peter A. Jackson, “An Explosion of Thai Identities: Global Queering and Re-imagining Queer Theory,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 2.4 (2000): 405–24; Peter A. Jackson, “Capitalism and Global Queering: National Markets, Parallels among Sexual Cultures, and Multiple Queer Modernities,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 15.3 (2009): 357–95; Fran Martin et al., eds., *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

romanization) are rarely used in everyday life. When referring to or self-identifying as queer, informants of this study used terms such as *gay*, *les* (lesbian), *lyun* (bent), TB (tomboy or butch lesbian), homo (homosexual), *tongzhi/tung zi*,⁶ and *zi gei jan* (we).⁷

There are three meanings of “normal” in this chapter. The first is the concept of heteronormativity coined by Michael Warner.⁸ Heteronormativity assumes that all social actors are heterosexual and reproductive by default. It is a set of structural and institutional arrangements that privileges certain sexual practices and relationships such as being heterosexual, married, and monogamous.⁹ The second meaning of “normal” refers to a conformist type of queer politics that normalizes the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals. There has been a shift in Anglo-American queer politics since the 1990s from confrontational politics such as coming out and mass protest to normalization stressing integration and respectability, which turns out to be an “antipolitical” politics reducing queer politics to the mere quest for equal rights.¹⁰ Likewise, in Hong Kong, since the decriminalization of male homosexuality in 1991, the local *tongzhi* movement has always preferred normalization over confrontation. This has been further complicated by both the colonial government (1842–1997), which depoliticized local society, and the postcolonial government, which essentialized Chinese culture as social harmony.¹¹ The third meaning of “normal” in this chapter is the concept of homonormativity coined by Lisa Duggan as a

⁶ *Tongzhi* (Hanyu pinyin) / *tung zi* (Cantonese romanization), which literally means “comrade,” is the generic term referring to lesbian and gay in Chinese contexts. See, for example, Travis S. K. Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities: Mamba, Tongzhi and Golden Boy* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 14.

⁷ Although Hanyu pinyin is the most widely used Chinese romanization system, it is based on Mandarin pronunciation, which does not represent the local linguistic customs of Cantonese spoken by most Han Chinese in Hong Kong. In this chapter, I transliterate Chinese terms used in Hong Kong in Cantonese romanization according to the Jyutping system developed by Linguistic Society of Hong Kong, with tone indicators omitted. Personal names will follow individuals’ preferences.

⁸ Michael Warner, “Introduction: Fear of a Queer Planet,” *Social Text* 29 (1991): 3–17.

⁹ Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (London: Routledge, 1993), 100–33.

¹⁰ Steven Seidman, “From Identity to Queer Politics: Shifts in Normative Heterosexuality and the Meaning of Citizenship,” *Citizenship Studies* 5.3 (2001): 321; Warner, *Trouble*, 24–25, 60. In the United States, national gay politics has been reduced to two issues, marriage and military service. See also Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

¹¹ Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, ch. 2; Day Wong, “(Post-)identity Politics and Anti-normalization: (Homo)sexual Rights Movement,” in *Remaking Citizenship in Hong Kong*, ed. Agnes S. Ku and Ngai Pun (Oxon: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 195–214.

critique of the new organizing principle in contemporary Anglo-American queer politics.¹² Duggan argued that the new emphasis on domesticity and consumption in queer politics has been accompanied and fostered by neoliberal politics, which narrowly defines democracy as the privatization of public, affective, and economic life.¹³ Nonetheless, homonormativity is not parallel to nor comparable with heteronormativity since the structure of queer lives is never commensurate with the institutional and structural perpetuation of heterosexuality.¹⁴

Normal is an impossible ideal for everyone, especially the queer.¹⁵ When discussing sexuality and gender in mainland China and Hong Kong, Yau Ching highlighted the relativity and specificity of normal as an ideal being negotiated and fine-tuned at different historical conjunctures and in different power structures.¹⁶ Yau observed that instead of resisting normativity, queer subjects in China and Hong Kong attempted to access and achieve normativity because of socialization and internalized homophobia. Yau used the example of gay boys' desire to sleep with straight boys to illustrate the paradoxical moment that queers confirmed their impossibility to be normal only when they were being closest to the ideal of normal.¹⁷ Before coming out, the ambivalence of HOCC's sexuality was an important part of her stardom that allowed fans' playful speculation, evidenced by the vibrant queer fan culture. Fans celebrated the pleasure of queer reading but at the same time enacted a kind of self-discipline about it as regards HOCC. After HOCC came out, that is, after her "queerness" was confirmed, instead of fading, the tension between queer and normal has shifted from the heteronormative negotiation of a "proper" female gender and accorded sexuality to the negotiation of a "proper" lesbian embodiment. I argue that the shift is circumscribed by the changing sexual culture and queer politics in Hong Kong regulated by the strategic alliance of postcolonial administration, Chinese family, and religion.

¹² Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*, ed. Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 175–94.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 179–80.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 191n9.

¹⁵ Warner, *Trouble*, 54–55.

¹⁶ Yau Ching, "Dreaming of Normal While Sleeping with Impossible: Introduction," in *As Normal as Possible: Negotiating Sexuality and Gender in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, ed. Yau Ching (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), 3–4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

Data for this study are drawn from semi-structured interviews and participant observation conducted between 2009 and 2014: the first stage between February 2009 and May 2010 for my MPhil thesis and the second stage in mid-2014 as part of my PhD research. Informants interviewed in the first stage ($n = 13$) were recruited from the official fan club of HOCC, the HOCC International Fan Club (HOCC IFC). Informants for the second stage ($n = 20$) were recruited through snowball sampling, including four who had been interviewed in the first stage.¹⁸ Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to three hours and were conducted in Cantonese or Mandarin. Transcripts were translated into English. In total, I have interviewed twenty-nine self-identified fans of HOCC: twenty-five female and four male whose ages ranged from sixteen to thirty-five. All of them are Hong Kong natives except one, who is from eastern China and had lived in Hong Kong for two years at the time of the interview. Educational background varied from secondary education to graduate school, and years of fandom ranged from four to more than ten years. All the names appearing in this chapter are pseudonyms. In terms of self-identified sexuality, there are eight lesbians, three gay men, eighteen straights, and three “ambivalent” at the time of interview.¹⁹

Queer reception goes beyond identity politics and one's sexual identities.²⁰ In particular, most subjects in Chinese societies may not be able to afford to politicize their identities.²¹ Furthermore, there are inconsistencies of identity and fan practices, such as lesbian fans denying HOCC's sexuality and straight fans enjoying queer reading. For this purpose, I did not restrict myself to recruiting informants of a particular sexuality.²² Identities are multiple and relational. Fandom is defined by not only observable practices such as consumption pattern and affective investment²³ but also the fabrication of one's public and

¹⁸ The HOCC IFC was founded in 2002. About two-thirds of all the informants were once its members. Some did not renew the annual membership or have never joined because of the stigma of being a fan or for practical reasons such as having alternative access to concert tickets.

¹⁹ All lesbian and gay informants except one were closeted in workplace. Three had come out to their families at the time of interview.

²⁰ Doty, *Making Things*, 15.

²¹ Yau, “Dreaming of Normal,” 2.

²² Although some of the informants adored HOCC for reasons other than her queerness, once they self-identified as fans of HOCC, whose gender and sexuality is always under public scrutiny, the negotiation with HOCC's gender and sexuality became inevitable.

²³ Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 8; Lawrence Grossberg, “Is There a Fan in the House? The Affective Sensibility of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 50–65.

intimate life. A fan is also a partner, sibling, offspring, colleague, friend, opinion leader, and so on of other members in the society. Hence, queer fan practices are always relational and situated in a wider nexus of social relations. My multiple positions as an aca-fan researcher, a Hong Kong native, and a cisgender queer woman when engaging with HOCC's texts and interacting with informants well demonstrates the importance of reflexivity and intersectionality of fan practices.²⁴ This chapter does not aim to generalize HOCC fandom but to present a picture of its queer fan culture fabricated by my informants' stories.

HOCC Stardom²⁵

During my teenage years, I thought of starting a revolution. Revolution is not only about mass protest and being heroic but also standing out and staying firm in one's faith. . . . I have been a persevering person in fans' eyes. To thank them for their support over the years, I shall hold on to what I believe in.²⁶

HOCC was born in Hong Kong in 1977 and spent most of her teenage years in Montreal, Canada. She returned to Hong Kong to enter and win the championship of the fifteenth New Talent Quest in 1996 and later became the only female student of Cantopop diva Anita Mui. She established her own music label Goomusic in 2001. In September 2004, she joined the East Asia Music (Holdings) Limited, which granted her autonomy in production, for which she was always grateful. She was one of the best-selling singers in Hong Kong from 2006 to 2014.²⁷ She was awarded the Golden Prize of Female Singer 2006 and voted by audience members as My Favorite Female Singer 2013 in the Ultimate Song Chart Awards Presentation,

²⁴ Cisgender refers to individuals whose body and personal identity match with the gender assigned at birth. This term aims to replace "nontransgender" so as to decentralize gender narratives that base on biological facts. Kristen Schilt and Laurel Westbrook, "Doing Gender, Doing Heteronormativity: 'Gender Normals,' Transgender People, and the Social Maintenance of Heterosexuality," *Gender & Society* 23.4 (August 1, 2009): 461.

²⁵ For textual analysis of HOCC's stardom, see Wai-man Vivian Au, "The Queer Female Stardom: Emerging from Transnational Chinese Singing Contests" (MPhil thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2012), ch. 1; Nicholas Wong, "Dialogue Two: From Rose Mary to Rolls Royce; Denise Ho X Wyman Wong Queerness in Denise Ho's Music," in *Fe/male Bodies*, ed. Daryl Cheung et al. (Hong Kong: Kubrick, 2005), 62–68; Rainsta Lai, "Dialogue Two: Rose/Mary/Rose-Mary: The Blurring of Gender Boundaries," in *Fe/male Bodies*, ed. Daryl Cheung et al. (Hong Kong: Kubrick, 2005), 56–61.

²⁶ *Music Dream: Ho Denise Wan See*, produced by RTHK, first broadcast June 13, 2010, by TVB. Directed and written by Winnie Ho. <<AU: Add to works cited?>>

²⁷ "Hong Kong Top Sales Music Award Presented [2001–2014]," International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (Hong Kong Group) Limited, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://www.ifpihk.org/hong-kong-top-sales-music-award-presented-01-14/hong-kong-top-sales-music-award-presented/2014>.

among many others.²⁸ Her popularity has grown in transnational and transcultural Chinese societies after she issued two Mandarin albums, which earned her nominations for the Best Mandarin Female Singer at the Golden Melody Awards in 2012 and 2014.²⁹ In the musical drama *Awakening*, she impersonated the male lead Jia Baoyu and performed 109 shows in mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Singapore between 2011 and 2013. After her active participation in the civil rights movements in Hong Kong, HOCC became an independent musician in 2015.³⁰

HOCC can be regarded as an idiosyncratic cultural producer since she is one of the few Hong Kong singers who has repeatedly produced songs with queer overtones. Working closely with queer lyricist Wyman Wong,³¹ she has produced songs such as “Rose Mary” (“Lou si maa lei”) and its sequel “Goodbye Rose Mary” (“Zoi gin lou si maa lei”) on lesbianism,³² “Rolls Royce” (“Lou si loi si”) on male same-sex eroticism, “Coffee in a Cola Bottle” (“Hei seoi zeon leoi dik gaa fe”) on transgenderism, and “Illuminati” (“Kwong ming wui”) on queer solidarity. In 2005, she produced and performed in the well-received musical stage play *Butterfly Lovers* (*Loeng zuk haa sai cyun kei*), a reinterpretation of the well-known Chinese heterosexual tragic legend *Butterfly Lovers*. Specifically, a twist was added to touch upon homoeroticism and transgenderism.³³ Although HOCC’s songs cover a wide range of themes, songs that are said to have queer undertones are often award winning and constantly highlighted by the media in order to further speculate about her sexuality.

HOCC’s gender representation has been considered nonnormative since the late 1990s, when most female singers embodied normative or hyper femininity, by, for instance, wearing high heels and skirts, putting on heavy makeup, and having long hair. HOCC had appeared

²⁸ The Ultimate Song Chart of the Commercial Radio Hong Kong is one of the major local music charts.

²⁹ The Golden Melody Awards is an annual Taiwanese music award for popular and traditional music, which is widely considered one of the most important awards in Mandopop.

³⁰ “Ho Wan Si: Ngo dik duk laap syun jin, jyu 2015 nin” [HOCC: My declaration of independence 2015], *Apple Daily*, March 23, 2015, accessed April 19, 2015, <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/eneews/realtime/20150323/53560989>.

³¹ Names of the following songs are translated into English by me.

³² The former song is about the romance between Rose and Mary, and the latter is about their breakup.

³³ This new story was set in modern times. Rolls (played by male singer Endy Chow) and Royce (played by HOCC) were a pair of heterosexual lovers. Royce had been killed in an accident and was born into a biological male Joe (played by male actor Joey Leung) in the life after death. Rolls, Joe, and other characters struggled with gender and sexuality as the story developed.

as a long-haired rocker singing songs of soft rock genre in her debut album *first* in 2001. Over the years, HOCC's hair has gotten shorter, and it has become one of the major concerns of fans panicked or excited by gossip about her lesbianism. Apparently, HOCC did not intend to replicate the androgynous style of her predecessors such as Anita Mui and Anthony Yiu-ming Wong. However, she has remained an androgynous icon in the industry during the 2000s.³⁴ She was given the title Most Handsome in Golden Melody Awards Presentation in 2012 by the Taiwanese media and Prince Charming (*Naam san*) in 2014 by Hong Kong Golden, a popular local Internet forum famous for parody. Although these titles were largely for fun and sometimes mockery, they suggest that HOCC's gender representation has gradually been received less negatively by the public.



Figure 1 Yes! Cards (collectible issued by teen magazine *Yes!*) of HOCC, 2001–2004.
(Courtesy of Kaitlyn)

Furthermore, speculation on HOCC's sexuality and love affairs involving other female celebrities, on which the queer fan culture was largely centered, has been a frequent topic in local tabloids since the early 2000s. Before coming out, HOCC remained low profile and did not deny her alleged homosexuality. Unsurprisingly, this incited more gossip. The following interviews conducted in 2003 demonstrated her attitude toward such speculation:

In my opinion, being a lesbian or not isn't a big deal.³⁵

If I cared about others speculating on my sexuality, I would not have sung songs like "Goodbye Rose Mary." I have anticipated people discussing . . . I don't feel offended. In fact, I find it

³⁴ Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, 65.

³⁵ "Ho bat ci ngo—ho wan si" [Why not be like me—Denise Ho], *Sing kei luk zau hon* [Saturday Magazine], March 29, 2003, 20.<<AU: Add to works cited?>>

funny. . . . It is futile to clarify since there are always excuses to scrutinize my sexuality.³⁶

The most well-known piece of gossip was the alleged decade-long same-sex romance with Joey Yung, a top female singer in Hong Kong. The gossip emerged in the early 2000s, but both of them seldom admitted to being a couple in public.³⁷ HOCC was also alleged to have had a short-term heterosexual relationship with singer Wilfred Lau in the early 2000s. In HOCC fandom, there were two groups of fans, *goocho* and *sigoo*, who respectively supported HOCC's homosexual relationship with Joey Yung (thereafter Goo/Cho) and her heterosexual relationship with Wilfred Lau (thereafter Si/Goo). The name of these pairings was derived from the stars' given name or nickname: *Goo* (mushroom) is the nickname of HOCC; *Cho* is the first character of Yung's first name in Cantonese; *Si* is the first character of Lau's nickname, *Si hing* (senior male fellow).³⁸ There were significantly more supporters of Goo/Cho than Si/Goo, because there was more "evidence" supporting the former, and HOCC and Yung individually had more successful careers than Lau in the mid-2000s. Fans who disliked Goo/Cho and insisted on HOCC's heterosexuality were labelled as anti-*goocho*. In addition, whether before or after coming out, HOCC's sexuality has been under public attack.³⁹ She was occasionally portrayed as an aggressive butch lesbian. For example, a report published by *Apple Daily* on December 1, 2002, called HOCC a "flirty king." Nevertheless, HOCC seldom responded to these reports since she considered sexuality a private matter.

Situating Queer Fan Culture: *Tongzhi* in Hong Kong

Although it is now generally agreed that audience reception and practices are situated in a complex web of transnational exchanges and converging global media culture, local

³⁶ "Tung sing lyun ho wan si" [Homosexual Denise Ho], *Faai zau hon* [Weekly express], April 30, 2003, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.xpweekly.com/share/xpweekly/0245/ent/20030430ent0072/content.htm>.

³⁷ HOCC had "accidentally" come out in a game show in 2009 but she subsequently denied it. See Eva Cheuk-Yin Li, "Exploring the Productiveness of Fans: A Study of Ho Denise Wan See (HOCC) Fandom" (MPhil thesis, University of Hong Kong, 2011), 197–208. Yung acknowledged her intimate relationship with HOCC in an interview published by *Oriental Daily* on October 24, 2011, which stirred up discussion among lesbians in the Chinese-speaking world. See Denise Tse-Shang Tang, "An Unruly Death: Queer Media in Hong Kong," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18.4 (2012): 602–3. However, Yung denied it in another report published by *Oriental Daily* on October 25, 2011.

³⁸ Both *Goo* and *Cho* are not formal but convenient Cantonese transliterations widely used by fans.

³⁹ After coming out, HOCC was once asked by a journalist whether she would consider undergoing sex reassignment surgery, after the Court of Final Appeal had ruled transsexuals having the right to marry in May 2013, which illustrated public misunderstanding of sexual minorities. In late 2014, HOCC's sexuality was attacked by progovernment supporters for her prodemocratic stance on universal suffrage during the Umbrella Revolution or Occupy Central in Hong Kong.

trajectories and social structure remain prominent in shaping these activities. Therefore, I argue that the queer fan culture in HOCC fandom is embedded in the sexual and gender cultures in Hong Kong, in particular, the situation of *tongzhi* there. Meanwhile, fans have negotiated and challenged these norms and regulations by developing various tactics and drawing from transnational and global media.

The *tongzhi* movement in Hong Kong has experienced recurrent backlash since its emergence in the 1980s. After a decade of legal and social debates on the practice of homosexuality triggered by the controversial suicide of Scottish police inspector John MacLennan in 1980,⁴⁰ homosexual conduct between males over the age of twenty-one in private was decriminalized in 1991. This consequentially confined local *tongzhi* movement to the fight for private rights and normalization.⁴¹ After the handover of sovereignty in 1997, the postcolonial government, the heteropatriarchal Chinese family, and religion have become the three key sites of dominance that have regulated and shaped sexuality.⁴² The postcolonial Special Administrative Region Government established on July 1, 1997, is an illiberal quasi-democratic regime, which has hindered both the queer and nonqueer in fighting for full political rights and citizenship.⁴³ Second, the notion of the Chinese family in Hong Kong has been established and constructed into a powerful self-regulating site of heteronormativity since the colonial period.⁴⁴ The congested living conditions in Hong Kong as a result of the state's capitalist land use policy further closets homosexuality under familial heteronormativity.⁴⁵ Third, religion mainly in the form of evangelical activism has been influential in Hong Kong, not only because of the fact that a significant proportion of local education, medical, and social services are provided by Christian churches and organizations, but also on account of the rise of activist groups focusing on sex and morality since 1997.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ For a brief summary of the case, see , *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, 49.

⁴¹ Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, 50–51.

⁴² Travis S. K. Kong, Sky Hoi Leung Lau, and Eva Cheuk Yin Li, "The Fourth Wave? A Critical Reflection on the *Tongzhi* Movement in Hong Kong," in *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, ed. Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie (London: Routledge, 2015), 189–90.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁴ Aihwa Ong, "On the Edge of Empires: Flexible Citizenship among Chinese in Diaspora," *positions* 1.3 (1993): 753–62.

⁴⁵ Travis S. K. Kong, "A Fading *Tongzhi* Heterotopia: Hong Kong Older Gay Men's Use of Spaces," *Sexualities* 15.8 (2012): 899–901.

⁴⁶ Kong, Lau, and Li, "Fourth Wave?" 190.

These evangelical activist groups privilege the heterosexual, monogamous, and nuclear family as the ideal prototype for social order and public morality in order to press for their political agenda.⁴⁷ The postcolonial government, Chinese family, and religion have formed a strategic alliance that Kong and colleagues called “the trinity of governance.”⁴⁸ For example, in 2005, the government appointed the Society of Truth and Light, an evangelical group well known for its homophobic stance and activism, to develop the curriculum of moral and civil education for the training of secondary school teachers and principals.⁴⁹

Legally, there are no ordinances against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Same-sex marriage or registered partnership is not recognized. Lesbians and gays are mostly closeted, and homosexuality is rarely discussed publicly.⁵⁰ Public acceptance of homosexuality has gradually increased, but public opinion remains divided. A survey launched by the colonial government in 1995 showed a low level of public acceptance.⁵¹ A decade later, divergent views persisted, especially on whether homosexuals were “psychologically normal” and whether homosexuality was in conflict with family and community values.⁵² Furthermore, discrimination has been widely observed and experienced by sexual minorities.⁵³ Deprivation of formal political rights has channeled queer sensibilities in Hong Kong to cultural production and economic consumption since the 1980s.⁵⁴ *Tongzhi*

⁴⁷ Wai Ching Angela Wong, “The Politics of Sexual Morality and Evangelical Activism in Hong Kong,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2013): 340–60.

⁴⁸ Kong, Lau, and Li, “Fourth Wave?” 190.

⁴⁹ Denise Tse-Shang Tang, *Conditional Spaces: Hong Kong Lesbian Desires and Everyday Life* (Hong Kong University Press, 2011), 74–75.

⁵⁰ Ting-Yiu Robert Chung et al., *Hong Kong LGBT Climate Study 2011–12*, Survey Report (Hong Kong: Public Opinion Programme, University of Hong Kong, May 14, 2012), accessed March 5, 2015, http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/report/LGBT2011_12/content/resources/report.pdf.

⁵¹ MVA Hong Kong Limited, *Survey on Public Attitudes towards Homosexuals, Report Prepared for the Home Affairs Bureau, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government*, March 2005, 1, accessed March 5, 2015, <http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr05-06/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0310cb2-public-homosexuals-e.pdf>.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵³ Ting-yiu Robert Chung, Ka-lai Karie Pang, and Wing-Yi Winnie Lee, *Survey on Hong Kong Public's Attitudes towards Rights of People of Different Sexual Orientations* (Hong Kong: Public Opinion Programme, University of Hong Kong, November 7, 2012), accessed March 5, 2015, http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/report/LGBT_CydHo/content/resources/report.pdf; Yiu-tung Suen et al., *Study on Legislation against Discrimination on the Grounds of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Intersex Status* (Hong Kong: Equal Opportunities Commission, 2016), accessed June 1, 2016, <http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/upload/ResearchReport/20161251750293418312.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, ch. 2.

spaces such as gay consumption spaces have flourished since the 1990s, and lesbian consumption spaces have also emerged, albeit on a smaller scale.⁵⁵ The International Day against Homophobia Hong Kong event since 2005, Hong Kong Pride Parade since 2008 (except in 2010), and Pink Dot Hong Kong (since 2014) have attracted the media spotlight, and the number of participants has grown over the years. The number of participants in the pride parade (more than 9,000) and Pink Dot (more than 15,000) in 2015 hit the record high as reported by their respective organizers.

In terms of gender diversity, although there had been improvements since the late 1990s, recent studies have suggested that gender stereotypes in different realms of social life have prevailed and the public has remained divided on them.⁵⁶ Regarding legal protection, support for antidiscrimination legislation has doubled over the past decade, accounting for more than half of the population in 2015.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, there is increased opposition to same-sex marriage or registered partnership at the same time.⁵⁸ Concerning lesbians in particular, social visibility has been low if not neglected. Although legal criminalization has been focused solely on male homosexuality because sexual intercourse is defined by the presence of male genitalia and the act of penetration, lesbianism has been regulated in different social and intimate spaces such as those of family, church, school, and workplace.⁵⁹ Regarding media representation, both lesbians and gays have been negatively portrayed in

⁵⁵ Ibid.; Tang, *Conditional Spaces*, ch. 2.

⁵⁶ For studies between late 1990s and early 2000s, see Lucetta Yip Lo Kam, "Recognition through Mis-recognition: Masculine Women in Hong Kong," in *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities*, ed. Fran Martin et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 99–116; Anthony Fung and Eric Ma, "Formal vs. Informal Use of Television and Sex-Role Stereotyping in Hong Kong," *Sex Roles* 42.1/2 (2000): 57–81. For gender stereotypes in the late 2000s, see Equal Opportunities Committee, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, *Study on Public Perception of Portrayal of Female Gender in the Hong Kong Media—Executive Summary* (Hong Kong: Social Sciences Research Centre, University of Hong Kong, commissioned by the Equal Opportunities Commission, 2009), accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.eoc.org.hk/eoc/upload/20096111239594027760.pdf>; Women's Commission, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, *Findings of Survey on Community Perception on Gender Issues* (Hong Kong: Women's Commission, 2009), accessed March 1, 2015, <http://www.women.gov.hk/download/research/Community-perception-survey-findings.pdf>.

⁵⁷ Suen et al., *Study on Legislation against Discrimination*.

⁵⁸ Ting-Yiu Robert Chung et al., *Survey on Hong Kong Public's Attitudes towards Rights of People of Different Sexual Orientations* (Hong Kong: Public Opinion Programme, University of Hong Kong, October 23, 2013), accessed March 1, 2015, http://hkupop.hku.hk/english/report/LGBT_CydHo2013/content/resources/report.pdf; Chung, Pang, and Lee, *Survey on Hong Kong Public's Attitudes*, November 7, 2012.

⁵⁹ Tang, *Conditional Spaces*; Carmen Ka Man Tong, "Being a Young Tomboy in Hong Kong: The Life and Identity Construction of Lesbian Schoolgirls," in *AsiaPacifiQueer: Rethinking Genders and Sexualities*, ed. Fran Martin et al. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 117–30.

newspaper and magazines since the 1990s.⁶⁰ Biased and heteronormative representations of queers have been observed in prime time television dramas.⁶¹ Recently, there has been an emergent homonormative media culture focused on upper-class celebrity lesbian relationships, usually featuring a wealthy butch providing for a femme partner.⁶²

Queer Fan Culture before HOCC's Coming-Out

The queer fan culture of HOCC has been predominantly centered on Goo/Cho. Prior to HOCC's coming out, the ambiguity of her sexuality provided resources for queer fan practices and fantasy. Fantasy is always a playful and significant part of fandom.⁶³ Fantasy and reality are not mutually exclusive since we can never understand nor experience social reality "objectively."⁶⁴ The realms of queer and normal are usually blurred since fans engage in fantasy to negotiate their own identities, desires, and preferences.⁶⁵

I like HOCC and Yung. If I read news about them going out together, I am happy. I don't know why but I feel happy for HOCC. She said she had loved a person for seven years. That person must be Joey Yung. (Summer, age twenty-seven, straight, interview in 2009)

Fans produced their own knowledge of Goo/Cho by homoeroticizing, collaging, and circulating materials including news, pictures, blog entries, and so on. They justified their activities by upholding the slogan "Imagination Is Free" (*waan soeng si min fai dik*), borrowing from the theme of HOCC's open-air concert "Happiness Is Free" ("Faai lok si min

⁶⁰ Chou, Wah Shan, *Tung zi leon* [On *tongzhi*], second edition (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Queer Press, 1997), ch. 8.

⁶¹ Nutong Xueshe, a local *tongzhi* organization, studied the representation of *tongzhi* in dramas produced by TVB, the major station providing free television service between 1976 and 2012, and found that more than 70 percent involved homophobic content such as portraying *tongzhi* as criminals or deviants. Nutong Xueshe, "Zeoi 'hung tung' kek zaap syun geoi" [Voting for the most homophobic television drama], n.d. <https://sites.google.com/site/gayvotetvb/home>; "TVB jau tiu hung tung fong cing sik" [TVB has a homophobic formula], *Apple Daily*, December 3, 2012, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://hk.apple.nextmedia.com/news/art/20121203/18088948>.

⁶² Tang, "Unruly Death," 608–10.

⁶³ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), ch. 4; Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 92; C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, *Soap Fans: Pursuing Pleasure and Making Meaning in Everyday Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, "Flow, Home, and Media Pleasures," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 38.5 (2005): 846.

⁶⁴ John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 124.

⁶⁵ Michael DeAngelis, *Gay Fandom and Crossover Stardom: James Dean, Mel Gibson, and Keanu Reeves* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 5.

fai dik”) in 2009. Summer actively looked for and enjoyed reading information about Goo/Cho. Her everyday routine included carefully reading every photo of HOCC on social networking sites for clues such as couple bracelets, known as “fishing-line bracelets” (*jyu si sau lin*) for their almost unnoticeable thinness.

Felicity (age twenty-four, lesbian, interview in 2008) claimed that she had a lot of “credible insider information” on Goo/Cho. Throughout the three-hour interview, she kept showing me the matching content in HOCC’s and Yung’s blog entries.⁶⁶ Similar to many fans, she refused the *goocho* identification since she believed that if HOCC was known as a lesbian, it would be scandalous and detrimental to her career. Therefore, she felt obliged to keep the discussion discreet.

Informants were aware of managing the boundary between normal and queer in online discussions.⁶⁷ Many informants enjoyed queer reading and playing with gossip about HOCC collectively, but they also acknowledged the prevalence of heteronormative values within the fan community and in society in general. The major fan online platform, the HOCC IFC forum,⁶⁸ became a site of heteronormativity since HOCC’s sexuality and Goo/Cho were considered sensitive topics. Fans were advised not to discuss these issues in the forum because some of them worried that the discussion, usually with “evidence” collected by fans, would attract paparazzi and adversely affect her career in the Chinese-speaking world. Disputes in the forum were common, as in this typical example:

It usually starts with an ordinary thread, for example, discussing recent photos of HOCC. Someone commented “very cool” [*hou jing*] and others agreed by adding “very cool boy” [*hou jing zai*]. Some would condemn this comment and defend HOCC by insisting “very cool girl” [*hou jing nei*]. . . . Very often those saying “a very cool girl” won at the end. (Megan, age sixteen, lesbian, interview in 2009)

⁶⁶ HOCC and Yung used to have their individual public blogs in Yahoo! Hong Kong. Yahoo! shut down all its blog service in 2013.

⁶⁷ Goo/Cho was also discussed by mainland Chinese fans and lesbian in online platforms, even after the “official” end of Goo/Cho in 2012. According to some informants, discussion in mainland Chinese forums could be much more explicit. Nonetheless, most Hong Kong fans did not engage in discussion in the mainland Chinese Internet.

⁶⁸ The HOCC IFC forum is available here: <http://www.hocc.cc/forum/index.php>. It was established in 2005 to replace the former official discussion bulletin *HOCC School*. One has to register an account to participate in discussion. Forum users who have joined the HOCC IFC could access an exclusive discussion board on exclusive resources such as videos, photos, and tickets for events. Discussion in the forum has been inactive since the setting up of HOCC Facebook Fan Page in 2008, where HOCC frequently interacted with fans.

Felicity had a similar experience of being criticized for starting a thread about a news report about the speculated “affairs” of HOCC and Sammi Cheng.⁶⁹ Because of the verification system of the IFC forum, some fans did not dare to risk having their account blocked by challenging these subtle regulations of discussion. As a result, some would discuss Goo/Cho elsewhere or in private, remaining silent on such matters in the forum.

Not only was the fan club forum a site of heteronormativity, but fans who expressed high-profile support of Goo/Cho in public, such as at concerts and fan events, were also marginalized. Informants would not easily disclose their attitude toward Goo/Cho at fan events. I have witnessed a small incident suggesting the precariousness of *goochos*. It was 7:30 p.m. on October 10, 2010, the second night of HOCC's *Supergoo* concert. I was wandering outside the Yellow Gate of the Hong Kong Coliseum, a parking area encircled by barricades, where I met Kaitlyn (age twenty-four, lesbian) and her friends.

Eva: Why are you here? HOCC has burnt incense and cut roasted pig yesterday.⁷⁰

Kaitlyn: (*Whispers*) We're waiting for Joey Yung. She can only come tonight as she has to go overseas tomorrow.

Another friend of Kaitlyn joined the conversation.

Kaitlyn's friend: Are the other people waiting here *goochos* as well?

Kaitlyn: (*Whispers*) Sh!!!!!! Don't speak it loud.

On the same evening, inside the concert hall, when HOCC was singing “Rose Mary,” a song about lesbian romance, Yung was seen running along the aisle to her seat in the auditorium. Many fans along the aisle stood up to cheer and witness that moment.⁷¹ Intriguingly, the concert hall, which Kaitlyn and other informants had assumed to be a heteronormative space because of the presence of anti-Goo/Cho fans and paparazzi, became a queer space where many joyously celebrated and welcomed Goo/Cho.

⁶⁹ Sammi Cheng is a top-selling Cantopop female singer and actress in Hong Kong.

⁷⁰ This ritual is performed before concerts or movie filming to pray for safety and success.

⁷¹ Audience response was included in the concert DVD of *SuperGoo*. See Li, “Exploring the Productiveness of Fans,” 209–10.

Since Goo/Cho discussion was not welcome in the official forum, some fans relocated their discussion to Internet forums Blur-F and Utopia. Blur-F was a local lesbian Internet forum set up in 1998. There was a thread about a tabloid reporting HOCC, Yung, and Yung's mother having barbecue together at Christmas in 2008, which then quickly became a Goo/Cho discussion thread and attracted HOCC fans, including straight fans who had not heard of Blur-F before.⁷² Between December 2008 and January 2010, there were 570 pages of discussion with 11,386 posts.

I am very happy as I can discuss Goo/Cho freely. I remember somebody warned us about HOCC IFC's reaction in the thread. Then someone else posted the link in HOCC's blog and HOCC's reply seemed to be positive. I was extremely happy! I even wonder if HOCC has a Blur-F account (*chuckles*)! (Felicity, interview in 2009)

Partially inspired by the long discussion thread in Blur-F, Kaitlyn established Utopia (pseudonym) in 2009, which was dedicated to Goo/Cho discussion online. It flourished after HOCC's "accidental" coming out in mid-2009.⁷³ *Goochos* gathered there to share information and circulate fan fiction and Goo/Cho videos. It served as an alternative space for Goo/Cho discussion and articulation until mid-2012 when Goo/Cho was "officially over".

Fan art, fan video, and femslash were the major forms of queer fan cultural production. Fans collaged photos of HOCC and Yung to highlight the duplication of their clothes and accessory items. Some of them also produced and circulated cartoon illustrations about the interaction between a mushroom, which was the literal meaning of HOCC's nickname Goo, and a rabbit resembling the Dutch cartoon character Miffy, which was Yung's favorite cartoon character. These illustrations often appeared in fan videos as well. All the informants interviewed in the first stage of data collection had either heard of or watched Goo/Cho videos. Fans juxtaposed and edited songs, audio interviews, video clips, and pictures of HOCC and

⁷² "Aa si zip zoi zou ji mou neoi taan cyun siu" [HOCC took Joey Yung and mother to barbeque], *Blur-F*, December 25, 2008, accessed February 1, 2010, <http://www.Blur-F.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=41695&extra=page%3D1&page=1>. The thread was locked by the forum administrator in January 2010 and Blur-F was shut down in 2012. A copy has been downloaded. <<AU: Can you direct the reader to the copy? The thread was archived by the Internet Archive. *Internet Archive*, July 2, 2010, accessed 30 November, 2016, [>>https://web.archive.org/web/20100702181808/http://www.blur-f.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=41695&extra=page%3D1&page=1](https://web.archive.org/web/20100702181808/http://www.blur-f.net/forum/viewthread.php?tid=41695&extra=page%3D1&page=1)>>

⁷³ For HOCC's "accidental" coming out, see note 37. To keep the forum discreet, Kaitlyn has tightened the registration procedure. The forum has been restructured several times since 2009.

Yung from news reports, Facebook, Weibo,⁷⁴ and blogs to articulate the Goo/Cho romance.⁷⁵ These fan videos were uploaded to YouTube and reuploaded to mainland Chinese video sharing sites such as Tudou and Youku.⁷⁶ They usually showcased photo hunts of HOCC and Yung's duplicated outfits, accessories, and personal belongings. While Kaitlyn equated these videos with those played in wedding banquets, Summer, who self-identified as straight, found them touching even after repeated watching. Some of my informants admitted that they watched Goo/Cho fan videos much more frequently than HOCC's concert DVDs.

Comparatively, femslash was less known to fans. Femslash, also known as female slash, femmeslash, or girlslash, is derived from the term "slash," which refers to fans' writing of romantic or erotic relationships between two male characters; with femslash it is two female characters.⁷⁷ There has been limited scholarship on femslash, compared to that on slash.⁷⁸ While slash has been argued to be subversive for liberating straight women's erotic desires,⁷⁹ it is unclear whether established arguments on slash can be equally applied to the subculturally and erotically distinctive practice of femslash.⁸⁰ In HOCC fandom, femslash was largely circulated in a restricted area in Utopia. By the end of May 2009, there were fifty titles contributed by twenty-two registered members. All of them were based on the public personae of HOCC and Yung. Most of the stories used nicknames for HOCC and Yung.⁸¹ New fictional characters were sometimes added. Recontextualization was common, such as

⁷⁴ Weibo, literally meaning microblog, is a popular social networking site in mainland China. Since both Facebook and Twitter are blocked in mainland China, celebrities in Hong Kong and Taiwan registered Weibo accounts to interact with mainland Chinese fans. HOCC's Weibo account was removed in October 2014 because of her support of the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong.

⁷⁵ For example, fans widely believed that HOCC's song "The Red Roof" ("Hung uk deng") and Yung's song "The Yellow Gate" ("Wong sik daai mun") referred to the house of Miffy, the Dutch cartoon character that Yung adored. Both songs were written and arranged by Carl Wong, with lyrics by Wyman Wong.

⁷⁶ Some of the Goo/Cho fan videos on YouTube were removed by users after the "official" breakup of Goo/Cho in mid-2012. There were a few left in late 2014 by searching with keyword *goocho* (in Chinese or English).

⁷⁷ Julie Levin Russo, "Textual Orientation: Queer Female Fandom Online," in *The Routledge Companion to Media and Gender*, ed. Cynthia Carter, Linda Steiner, and Lisa McLaughlin (London: Routledge, 2014), 452.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 453.

⁷⁹ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 191–92.

⁸⁰ Russo, "Textual Orientation," 453.

⁸¹ For example, the character of HOCC would be named *C* or *See* while that of Joey Yung would be named *Cho*, *Yee*, or other Chinese names with the same Cantonese pronunciation. Sometimes, the two protagonists were given new names, but authors would indicate them by other personal attributes such as zodiac signs: Taurus for the HOCC character and Gemini for the Yung character.

stories of life after death, court romance in imperial China, and college romance. Plots mainly focused on the emotional interactions and homosocial bonding between the female characters. The lead female characters (symbolizing HOCC and Yung) were usually well behaved and monogamous. Although it has been observed that femslash fandom in Anglo-American contexts has a strong overlap with the desire for nonfictional lesbian representation,⁸² research in non-Western femslash fandom has suggested that nonfictional lesbian topics and the voices of queer-identified fans are often neglected.⁸³ Goo/Cho femslash deliberately kept explicit lesbian erotic scenes invisible. The only explicit homoerotic scene was the two female protagonists, presumably the characters of HOCC and Yung, caressing each other, and the chapter ended there. This attracted many replies requesting sex scenes in the next chapter. However, the subsequent chapter began with a morning-after scene.

Recognizing readers' strong requests for same-sex erotic scenes, Kaitlyn insisted on keeping the forum "clean," despite the fact that femslash was accessible to a small group of registered forum users only. She was not very worried that the female same-sex erotic content would run afoul of the Control of Obscene and Indecent Articles Ordinance in Hong Kong but was deeply anxious that those materials could attract media attention and consequently harm HOCC's career. This demonstrated the strange relations of queer and normal in the realm of sex; on the one hand, sex is supposed to be "normal" as a human instinct, but, on the other hand, it is never treated "normally" if it disrupts psychic and cultural meanings.⁸⁴ Studies on gender and sexuality in Hong Kong also suggested that it was not even "normal" (usual) for women to talk about "normal" sex, that is, straight sex, in both public and private.⁸⁵ Furthermore, as 40 percent of educational service in Hong Kong has been provided by Christian organizations, sex-positive education has been banned from or rarely existed in the curricula in these schools.⁸⁶

⁸² Russo, "Textual Orientation," 457.

⁸³ Jing Jamie Zhao, "Fandom as a Middle Ground: Fictive Queer Fantasies and Real-World Lesbianism in FSCN," in "Access/Trespass," special conference issue, *Media Fields Journal* 10 (2014), accessed February 10, 2016, <http://mediafieldsjournal.squarespace.com/fandom-as-a-middle-ground/>.

⁸⁴ Warner, *Trouble*, 54–58.

⁸⁵ Sik Ying Ho and Ka Tat Tsang, "The Things Girls Shouldn't See: Relocating the Penis in Sex Education in Hong Kong," in *Gendering Hong Kong*, ed. Anita Kit-wa Chan and Wai Ling Wong (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 2004), 690–708.

⁸⁶ Wong, "Politics of Sexual Morality," 343–44; Tang, *Conditional Spaces*, 74–75.

In keeping with the aforementioned example of a typical fan dispute on HOCC's gender and sexuality, the paradoxical relation between normal and queer is also salient when fans negotiated HOCC's embodiment. *Zhongxing*, which literally means "neutral gender and/or sex," is a generic term in East Asian Chinese societies used to refer to a person (usually female) who does not do gender normatively.⁸⁷ HOCC has been repeatedly associated with *zhongxing* in tabloids and fan discussion. As an ambiguous, generic, and depoliticized term, *zhongxing* has proved to be a convenient excuse when fans faced the questioning of others.

My sister used to worry about my sexuality because I was very sporty and I mixed with tomboys at school. Whenever I watched HOCC on television, she teased me by saying "HOCC is gay." Then I would fire back, "no, she's just *zhongxing*!" It's hilarious when I look back. I was so silly (*chuckles*). (Hannah, age twenty-seven, straight, interview in 2014)

When facing scrutiny within her family, a heteronormative site, Hannah manipulated the ambivalence of *zhongxing* to normalize HOCC's gender representation and divert the questioning of her sexuality. On the other hand, Kaitlyn cared less about the implication of *zhongxing*.

I am fine as long as she does not look either B or G. (Kaitlyn, interview in 2009)

It is intriguing that Kaitlyn neglected the sex categories of female and male and directly took the localized lesbian genders B and G as points of reference. B or TB stands for tomboy, a localized term approximating butch lesbian in Hong Kong but not entirely reducible to "butch."⁸⁸ G or TBG stands for tomboy's girl, a localized term approximating femme lesbian. Presumably, TB dates TBG, but these labels are relational, and there are no agreements on what a TB is.⁸⁹ Instead of recognizing and celebrating HOCC's "queer" embodiment of in-betweenness (being between masculine and feminine and between male and female), Kaitlyn's negotiation of HOCC's embodiment suggested the normalizing tendency toward

⁸⁷ This term is widely used in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. *Zhongxing* (Hanyu pinyin), *zung sing* (Cantonese romanization) and *jhong sing* (Tongyong pinyin for Mandarin in Taiwan) all share the same written characters. See Eva Cheuk-Yin Li, "Approaching Transnational Chinese Queer Stardom as *Zhongxing* ('Neutral Sex/Gender') Sensibility," *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 1.1 (2015): 75–95.

⁸⁸ Helen Hok-Sze Leung, "Loving in the Stillness of Earthquakes: Ho Yuk—Let's Love Hong Kong," in *Ho Yuk—Let's Love Hong Kong: Script and Critical Essays*, ed. Ching Yau (Hong Kong: Youth Literary Press, 2002), 61.

⁸⁹ Lucetta Yip Lo Kam, "This Gender Called TB (TB 這性別)," *E-journal on Hong Kong Cultural and Social Studies* 2 (2002), accessed September 25, 2008, <http://www.hku.hk/hkucsp/ccex/ehkcsc01/frame.html?mid=1&smid=1&ssmid=7>.

fixity and the elimination of ambivalence.

Many informants interviewed in both stages of data collection had mixed feelings about *zhongxing*, but they generally welcomed it. Some of them considered *zhongxing* as the least offensive way to hint that one is a TB. Hence, *zhongxing* could be regarded as a normalizing term to “neutralize” (as its Chinese characters literally mean) the social existence and public visibility of women with nonnormative gender and sexuality, usually in the form of being masculine. However, informants’ welcoming attitude of using *zhongxing* to describe HOCC legitimized her queer if not ambivalent gender embodiments and sexuality. Without carrying the disapproving implication borne by labels such as tomboy, *naam jan po* (manly woman), and so on, *zhongxing* made the contestation and negotiation of ambivalence possible and yielded the potentiality to challenge the heteronormative regulation of female bodies.

While there were fans happily engaging in queer fan culture, others struggled. Sheena, who saw herself as “100 percent straight,” strongly rejected Goo/Cho, despite having studied in a girls’ school for seven years. Lesbian relationships were normatively constructed in girls’ schools but also repressed by heteronormative school regimes.⁹⁰ During the interview, Sheena hinted that she was used to seeing lesbians around but she disliked lesbian relationships because she considered herself a “traditional” woman who wanted to get married to a member of the opposite sex and then procreate. Therefore, she manipulated the ambiguity that HOCC left for her sexuality:

I feel very frustrated after reading all the gossip. . . . I force myself to read it because I have to know everything about her. I keep telling myself that those were mere speculations. (Sheena, age eighteen, straight, interview in 2009)

Inconsistencies of fan identities and fan practices were not uncommon. Erin was a tomboyish girl who had a short and trendy hairstyle. Her views on HOCC’s sexuality surprised me:

I am a woman who loves other women. I know how troublesome it can be. I wish HOCC could date a guy. Wilfred Lau treats her well. HOCC has to face so many challenges and criticisms at work. She really needs a guy who can protect her. Deep inside my heart, men and women are different. Men are for women to rely on. HOCC supports me mentally. So I wish that she is supported by another person. Joey Yung does not have this “function” (*chuckles*). I can imagine

⁹⁰ Tang, *Conditional Spaces*, 75–81.

how HOCC, after a tiring day of work, has to take care of Yung and write letters to comfort her in case they had a fight the night before. (Erin, age eighteen, lesbian, interview in 2009)

In a context where more than three-quarters of the population had observed discrimination against *tongzhi* and frequently witnessed the negative portrayal of lesbians and gays in the media,⁹¹ Erin acknowledged the privilege of being heterosexual and wished HOCC to be free from the “troubles” of being a lesbian. Her position not only demonstrated the internalization of heteronormativity and the stigmatization of the queer but also highlighted queers’ love-hate relationship with normal.

Turning Points in 2012: “Breakup” and Coming-Out

Elsewhere I have discussed the unlikelihood of fan queer activism in HOCC fandom due to an internal schism over Goo/Cho and external social repression.⁹² The internal schism changed drastically in 2012 when two incidents took place. The first was the “end” of Goo/Cho, the decade-long legendary gossip as described by informants. On the afternoon of an ordinary day in June 2012, I received dozens of text messages from (former) informants, friends, and colleagues about this “breaking news.” HOCC’s alleged ex-boyfriend Wilfred Lau, publicly admitted his relationship with Yung. A few days before this announcement, HOCC posted in Weibo that she felt like she had been “stabbed.” Ironically, this was widely perceived to be the “official” end as well as a long overdue recognition of the purported relationship between HOCC and Yung.

I was heartbroken. After the outbreak of the news, everyone including *goochos* or *sigoo* wept together. Many people in Hong Kong knew their relationship and some may have accepted them as a couple already. Even members of the Hong Kong Golden (where members were mostly homophobic) and BabyKingdom (a conservative local parenting forum) were sympathetic toward HOCC. (Olivia, age twenty-seven, lesbian, interview in 2014)

The second incident was HOCC’s coming-out in the Hong Kong Pride Parade on November 10, 2012.

In the face of discrimination, silence is no longer an option. . . . If I can speak out and say

⁹¹ Chung et al., *Survey on Hong Kong Public’s Attitudes*, October 23, 2013, 6.

⁹² Cheuk Yin Li, “The Absence of Fan Activism in the Queer Fandom of Ho Denise Wan See (HOCC) in Hong Kong,” in “Transformative Works and Fan Activism,” edited by Henry Jenkins and Sangita Shresthova, special issue, *Transformative Works and Cultures* 10 (2012), doi:10.3983/twc.2012.0325.

something that might—even in the smallest inkling—push us further down the path toward equal rights, I feel that all of my own reservations and concerns are insignificant.

I haven't found the right occasion for long. On this occasion of love, peace, and tolerance, I have my friends, colleagues, and family with me. I feel that I have the obligation to stand out and fight for more love, peace, and tolerance. I'd like to say this proudly—I am *tongzhi*!

I believe that the world can be a better place.⁹³

HOCC's coming-out can be read as the direct response to the discontent with the "trinity of governance" in Hong Kong. In subsequent interviews, HOCC admitted that her decision to come out was made only after the Legislative Council rejected the launch of a public consultation regarding the legislation of an ordinance against discrimination based on sexual orientation on November 7, 2012. Although more than 60 percent of the population supported the legislation to protect individuals of different sexualities from discrimination,⁹⁴ the legislation had been delayed because half of the legislators in the quasi-democratic system were not elected by universal suffrage and thus not accountable to the public. With the strong influence of evangelical activist groups that supported narrowly defined "traditional Chinese family values," official public consultation about the anti-discrimination ordinance was dropped. After coming out, HOCC cofounded the *tongzhi* group Big Love Alliance with other celebrities, activists, and politicians.⁹⁵ She became more vocal and involved in the *tongzhi* movement as well as other social movements, which was welcomed and appreciated by most of my informants.⁹⁶

After coming out, HOCC was said to have a new female partner, but fans were less keen to follow this relationship. Some informants admitted that they enjoyed the pleasure of juxtaposing materials and speculating in secret. Therefore, they lost interest when materials about HOCC and her alleged new partner were all readily available on social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram. While there were a few fan blogs remembering Goo/Cho,

⁹³ The first paragraph is translated into English by Arthur Tam and the rest is translated by me. Arthur Tam, "HOCC: Gay . . . and Happy!," *Time Out Hong Kong*, December 19, 2012, 12.

⁹⁴ Chung et al., *Survey on Hong Kong Public's Attitudes*, October 23, 2013, 7.

⁹⁵ The promotion of "big love" can be seen as an attempt to normalize queer politics for public empathy, which risks downplaying institutional and structural inequality sustained by heteronormativity.

⁹⁶ For example, she spoke on the issue of transsexual marriage in the Legislative Council Bills Committee meeting in April 2014. She has participated in the Umbrella Revolution for universal suffrage in Hong Kong and cofounded Hong Kong Shield to monitor authorities' abuse of violence during the movement in late 2014.

most informants had lost the motivation to follow HOCC's new relationship. Kaitlyn's forum, Utopia, which had been dedicated to Goo/Cho discussion, was restructured for solely discussing HOCC. Nonetheless, the tension between queer and normal did not fade, since heteronormativity remained prevalent both within her fandom and in Hong Kong.

There were fans who (still) struggled with HOCC's lesbianism. Sheena, whom I had interviewed in 2009, was one of them. She continued to develop tactics to normalize HOCC's sexuality:

I've been O-mouthed [Cantonese slang meaning "gobsmacked"] for the whole day! Whatever. I admire her courage but I don't think it's necessary to come out. If she didn't come out, there would still be room for imagination. Now, nothing is left. I used to be very happy whenever there was gossip about her and male singers. I am not discriminating against homosexuals. . . . But I am a very traditional person. I will accept her as bisexual because Lau used to be her boyfriend. She's not a lesbian. (Sheena, age twenty-three, straight, interview in 2014)

In spite of her denial of HOCC's lesbianism, Sheena remained a faithful supporter of HOCC's participation in social movements, even though she did not see the need to fight for *tongzhi* rights. Sheena's attitude reflected a heteronormative sex hierarchy, where bisexuality ("half-normal") is less discriminated against than homosexuality ("abnormal"). By emphasizing her nondiscriminatory attitude toward bisexuality, Sheena tried to normalize her hidden homophobic sentiments. Therefore, she was not only normalizing her hierarchy of queers but also her beliefs and values. Nonetheless, this hierarchy varied among different fans. For example, Kaitlyn, who used to be a lesbian, and Joyce, whose self-identified sexuality was "ambivalent," heavily denounced Yung's bisexuality as "unfaithful." Their view resembles the dualistic (hetero/homosexuality) sex hierarchy that stigmatizes bisexuality and undermines the agency of the individual sexual subject. It also demonstrates the marginalization of bisexuality within sexual minorities.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Bisexuals have been stigmatized as "promiscuous" and further marginalized within lesbian and gay communities for being unreliable and easily attracted by the privilege of heterosexual relationships. For a literature review of research on attitudes towards bisexuality, see Tania Israel and Jonathan J. Mohr, "Attitudes toward Bisexual Women and Men," *Journal of Bisexuality* 4.1/2 (2004): 120–23. For bi-negativity within the lesbian community, see Kirsten McLean, "Inside, Outside, Nowhere: Bisexual Men and Women in the Gay and Lesbian Community," *Journal of Bisexuality* 8.1/2 (2008): 67–68. In Hong Kong, there has been little attention paid to bisexuals compared with that to lesbians and gays. A small-scale survey conducted in 1999 and 2000 suggested that the general public tended to tolerate the existence of bisexuality based on the human rights discourse. Nonetheless, the survey also reported widespread misunderstanding and stigmatization of bisexuals as "morally weak" and "promiscuous". Anson Hoi Shan Mak, *Soeng sing cing yuk* [Bisexual desires], ed. Mary Ann Pui Wai King (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Women Christian Council, 2000), 67–69.

Discussion about the homonormative code of “proper” lesbian embodiment also arose after HOCC’s coming out. Hazel expressed her discontent with HOCC’s coming-out outfit:

It would be better if she was less boyish on that day. She was very manly. Her hairstyle was boyish and she dressed herself in a white top, black suit jacket, and sunglasses. Maybe she wants to present herself as a tough woman. . . . I’d prefer her coming out in a more feminine outfit. That would be more convincing. (Hazel, age twenty-nine, lesbian, interview in 2014)



Figure 2 HOCC in the Hong Kong Pride Parade on November 10, 2012.
(Courtesy of Apple Daily Hong Kong)

Many informants noticed that there has been an increased frequency of HOCC dressing in feminine and sexy outfits. For example, she wore a Louis Vuitton deep-V dress at the Golden Melody Awards Presentation in 2014 and showed her half-naked upper body on the cover of *Marie Claire* (Taiwan issue, July 2014). Joyce had mixed feelings about this:

I think she did that deliberately. She wants to show us that a lesbian can be girly too. . . . But I am confused. It seems to me that she overdoes femininity (*giggles*). She can just be what she used to be. She looks great in a T-shirt and jeans. Anyhow, it’s good to show people that a lesbian is not necessarily a TB, but it’s too much for me! (Joyce, age twenty-three, straight, interview in 2014)

Although many informants acknowledged that HOCC did not identify herself as a TB, some found HOCC in a feminine outfit unfamiliar. Joyce’s negotiation and evaluation of HOCC’s post-coming-out embodiment illustrated the style of TB in Hong Kong culture in which TBs are often addressed and communicated with as men and are frequently treated with hostility.⁹⁸ Mainstream heterosexual culture often pictures and represents lesbians through a heteronormative lens. For example, there is a strong stereotype that a lesbian relationship must consist of a TB and a TBG. Many informants appreciated HOCC’s intention to break through such a heteronormative stereotyping of lesbianism by emphasizing in-betweenness in her gender performativity after coming out. As HOCC once mentioned, “I am

⁹⁸ Leung, “Loving,” 61.

here to reverse the narrow definition of gender.”⁹⁹

Megan was inspired by HOCC's coming-out. She used this to negotiate the “ideal” lesbian relationship and experiment with her gender performativity. She was one of the informants reinterviewed in 2014. Since our first interview in late 2009, she had transformed from a masculine TB to a feminine-looking lesbian who had short hair and wore makeup.

It is definitely related to my current partner. But HOCC did make me think more deeply. Being lesbian doesn't require one to be TB. I can be simultaneously gentle, caring, and protective. I think I am now a *Pure* instead of TB.¹⁰⁰ If HOCC can let go of her masculine outward appearance, why can't I do the same? (Megan, age twenty-one, lesbian, interview in 2014)

She used to see *zhongxing* negatively. Her view of that has changed as well:

Zhongxing is nice. Hongkongers are too backward to understand lesbianism. Why can't we appreciate the diversity in lesbianism like that in *The L Word*?¹⁰¹ Hongkongers see *zhongxing* women like HOCC as TB but in the West, people may not think so. They will probably appreciate *zhongxing*.

She then shared with me her recent “*The L Word* experiment”: going to a luxurious hotel for fine dining in a very sexy and feminine outfit with her femme partner and how that confused waiters and other customers. She found this experience interesting and felt relieved about her gender performativity. On one hand, her criticism of the gender and sexual “backwardness” in Hong Kong was not uncommon, which easily fell into the widely shared Anglo-American-centric view of gender and sexual modernity. On the other hand, despite the fact that *The L Word* has been criticized for being highly selective in its representation of lesbians and even reinforcing heteronormativity,¹⁰² Megan tactically employed American pop culture to

⁹⁹ HOCC Facebook Fan Page, last modified May 27, 2014, accessed February 10, 2016, <https://zh-tw.facebook.com/HOCC/OCC/posts/10154199771680230>.

¹⁰⁰ “Pure” is a lesbian gender in Hong Kong referring to those who refuse the categories TB or TBG, or whose appearance cannot be recognized as TB or TBG. Its equivalence are *H* in mainland China and *bu fen* in Taiwan.

¹⁰¹ *The L Word* is an American television drama that ran from 2004 to 2009 about a group of lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders living in Los Angeles.

¹⁰² Samuel A. Chambers, “Heteronormativity and the L Word: From a Politics of Representation to a Politics of Norms,” in *Reading “The L Word”: Outing Contemporary Television*, ed. Kim Akass, Janet McCabe, and Sarah Warn (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 81–98.

challenge local norms and explore alternative gender performativity.

Lastly, fans' negotiation of HOCC's post-coming-out embodiment demonstrated the operation of homonormativity in negotiating the notion of a "proper" and respectable lesbian. This highlights the shift within the tension of queer and normal. Many informants felt uncomfortable when HOCC was associated with outward masculinity. Joyce, in particular, despised the new TB fans of HOCC who were immature and rude:

There is a lot of MK-looking TB trying to act like a man.¹⁰³ When HOCC was rising to fame in 2006, some TB said, "HOCC, stop pretending to be a TB!" Come on, HOCC never said she's a TB. . . . Now, those TB suddenly proclaim that they adore HOCC. They are so shallow. They adore HOCC because she came out and think that she is cool. I hate those MK [TB]. (Joyce, age twenty-three, straight, interview in 2014)

Samantha, who had a "typical TB-look"—wearing a pair of bold black glasses and spiky short hair—was also uneasy with HOCC being associated with TB:

I once saw a photo of HOCC together with the helpers of the Big Love Alliance. Many of them were . . . boyish girls. I think this makes the older generation see HOCC even more negatively. I don't know if it's good or bad, but it seems to stir up the whole issue [lesbianism and the presence of TB]. The older generation, like my mom, dislikes outspoken people and gay people. HOCC is both! I'd rather hide my fandom now. (Samantha, age twenty-three, lesbian, interview in 2014)

Samantha's uneasiness could be unpacked by deploying the three layers of meanings of "normal." Her discomfort with the public visibility of masculine women and assumption of all masculine girls being lesbian implied the internalization of heteronormative values. The anxiety over the *tongzhi* movement being "misrepresented" by masculine lesbians and thus losing public support illustrated the normalizing view of queer politics, which resembled the closeting of butch lesbians in the queer movement in the United States.¹⁰⁴ In Hong Kong, besides being wealthy, healthy, good looking, and filial as discussed in the literature on Chinese homonormativity,¹⁰⁵ the homonormative code of a "proper" lesbian also included the

¹⁰³ MK is the abbreviation of Mongkok, a district on the Kowloon Peninsula in Hong Kong known for attracting young people and hosting trendy fashion shops. It is also a derogatory slang referring to hipsters trying to be trendy but in fact failing, as well as people with poor fashion taste.

¹⁰⁴ Shane Phelan, "Public Discourse and the Closeting of Butch Lesbians," in *Butch/Femme: Inside Lesbian Gender*, ed. Sally R. Munt (London: Cassell, 1998), 191–99.

¹⁰⁵ Kong, *Chinese Male Homosexualities*, ch. 7; Tang, "Unruly Death"; Lucetta Yip Lo Kam, *Shanghai Lalas: Female Tongzhi Communities and Politics in Urban China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012).

avoidance of overt masculinity in hairstyle, outfit, and comportment. In this way, normalization of queer politics and homonormativity unintentionally works hand in hand with heteronormativity in policing fans' negotiation of HOCC's queer embodiment.

Conclusion

By demonstrating the queer fan culture in HOCC fandom before and after her coming-out, this chapter presents the entangling relations of queer and normal. Under the strategic alliance of the postcolonial government, heteropatriarchal Chinese family, and religion, which has powerfully shaped sexual cultures and reinforced heteronormative values in Hong Kong, HOCC fans have struggled when negotiating HOCC's gender and sexuality and their own. Before HOCC came out, queer reading was celebrated but precariously negotiated. Although many informants enjoyed queer reading and playing with the ambivalence in HOCC's sexuality, they were self-disciplined in both online and offline discussions out of fear of jeopardizing HOCC's career. The "official" end of Goo/Cho and HOCC's coming-out in 2012 were significant in reshaping the queer fan culture. HOCC's coming-out could be regarded as related to discontent with heteronormative dominance and oppression of *tongzhi* in Hong Kong. Instead of following HOCC's alleged new same-sex relationship, fans shifted their attention to negotiating her lesbian embodiment. The anxiety over the "proper" embodiment of a lesbian and "correct" representation of the *tongzhi* movement vividly demonstrated the intricate relations between heteronormativity and normalization in queer politics, as well as the new emerging homonormative codes in queer fan culture. The quest for normal has therefore fostered the homonormative understanding of queer. Nonetheless, the contingency and constant contestation of queer and normal also allowed the possibility of transgression and transformation, as, for example, in the use of the ambivalent notion of *zhongxing* that has "neutralized" the social visibility of queer and made possible the challenge of normal.

Lastly, what is normal and what is queer? Can one be normally queer or queerly normal? These are not mere wordplays but possible positions as a result of their intricate relationality and constant contestation operating at multiple levels. Situated within macrostructural and micropolitical forces, HOCC fans in Hong Kong desire to be queer by transgressing normal and paradoxically desire to be normal by tactically negotiating the limits of queer.

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Glossary (Not included in the published version)

<i>Cantonese Romanisation*</i>	<i>Hanyu Pinyin</i>	<i>Chinese characters</i>	<i>Meaning/Remarks</i>
huk ji	ku'er	酷兒	Chinese translation of 'queer'
lyun	lian	孌	'Bent'. Cantonese slang referring to homosexuality in Hong Kong
tung zi	tongzhi	同志	See footnote 6
zi gei jan	ziji ren	自己人	'We'. A term used by LGBT individuals in Hong Kong to refer to themselves. It has been widely proliferated by RTHK radio show 'We are family' (2006 – present).
Goo	gu	菇	Nickname of HOCC
Cho	zu	祖	Nickname of Joey Yung
si hing	shixiong	師兄	Nickname of Wilfred Lau
lou si maa lei	lusi mali	露絲瑪莉	Denise Ho, <i>hocc2</i> , EMI Hong Kong, 2002, compact disc.
zoi gin lou si maa lei	zaijian lusi mali	再見露絲瑪莉	Denise Ho, <i>free{love}</i> , EMI Hong Kong, 2002, compact disc.
lou si loi si	laosi. laisi	勞斯.萊斯	Denise Ho, <i>Butterfly Lovers</i> (梁祝下世傳奇), East Asia Music, 2005, compact disc.
hei seoi zeon leoi dik gaa fe	qishuizun li de kafei	汽水樽裡的咖啡	Denise Ho, <i>Butterfly Lovers</i> (梁祝下世傳奇), East Asia Music, 2005, compact disc.
hong uk deng	hong wuding	紅屋頂	Denise Ho, <i>What Really Matters</i> , East Asia Music, 2007, compact disc.
kwong ming wui	guangminghui	光明會	Denise Ho, <i>We Stand as On</i> , East Asia Music, 2007, compact disc.
wong sik daai mun	huangse damen	黃色大門	Yung, Joey, <i>Close Up</i> , Emperor Entertainment Group, 2007, compact disc.
gaa bou yuk	jia baoyu	賈寶玉	<i>Awakening</i> . Theatre Play directed by Edward Lam, Edward Lam Dance Theatre, 2011.
loeng zuk haa sai cyun kei	liangzhu xiashi chuanqi	梁祝下世傳	<i>Butterfly Lovers</i> . Theater Play directed by Roy Szeto and Jason

<i>Cantonese Romanisation*</i>	<i>Hanyu Pinyin</i>	<i>Chinese characters</i>	<i>Meaning/Remarks</i>
		奇	Wong, 2005.
waan soeng si min fai dik	kuaile shi mianfei de	幻想是免費的	‘Imagination is free’
faai lok si min fai dik	huanxiang shi mianfei de	快樂是免費的	‘Happiness is free’
jyu si sau lin	yusi shoulian	魚絲手鏈	‘Fishing-line bracelets’
zung sing	zhongxing	中性	‘Middle or Neutral gender/sex’. A generic term referring to gender non-normativity and/or androgyny in everyday context. See footnote 87.
naam jan po	nanrenpo	男人婆	‘Mannish women’

* Cantonese romanisation is based on the Jyutping system developed by Linguistic Society of Hong Kong with tones omitted. For further information, see:

Chinese University of Hong Kong (1998) *A Chinese Talking Syllabary of the Cantonese Dialect: An Electronic Repository* (粵語音韻集成電子版). *A Chinese Talking Syllabary of the Cantonese Dialect: An Electronic Repository* 粵語音韻集成電子版. Available from: <http://humanum.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/Lexis/Canton2/> (accessed 10 July 2017).